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Agriculture Series

AMBASSADOR CLARENCE A. BOONSTRA

Interviewed by: Allan Mustard with W. Garth Thorburn and James E. Ross

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Q: Okay, it is January 13th, 2006. We are in the residence of Ambassador Clarence Boonstra in Florida, and I'm Allan Mustard of the Foreign Agricultural Service.

And, Ambassador Boonstra, I would like to start the interview with you telling us how you became an assistant agricultural attachï¿½. What was your background, where were you from, and what led you to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and then out to your first assignment?

BOONSTRA: All right, first, I'd like to say our interview will be much easier if you just call me Clare. The ambassador thing's a long time ago.

Actually, I grew up on a part-time farm. My father was a furniture manufacturer in Grand Rapids, but he liked farming, and since I had all sisterI had no brotherI was the person who did all the farm work, so I have some background in agriculture. However, when I went to college, I was particularly interested in soils work, so I graduated from Michigan State University in geology. But that was way back in 1936 and I couldn't find any petroleum company or anybody else who was slightly interested in a geologist in those days.

But Huey Long had just been assassinated in Louisiana, and before he was assassinated, he had spent his last year trying to build, hopefully, he thought, a great university in the south at LSU (Louisiana State University). And he had hired a great many very excellent staff, faculty, from various schools throughout the northern United States and staffed a very good graduate school, but the university didn't have many graduate students in those days. The South was not noted for its graduate studies.

So he sent a team throughout the United States, to the northern schools, to recruit good students. Fortunately, my average was very good, so he recruited a number of people, including me. Huey didn't, but his team recruited a number of people to staff this new graduate school with students as well as faculty. Some of the people recruited remained my acquaintances all my life, including Hubert Humphrey, for example, who became vice president, and a number of other outstanding people, who likewise were in my position of not having jobs after finishing.

So down to LSU I went, in economics, and I received a master's degree in economics. Then I took some time off and I went to work for General Mills in Minneapolis, and I spent something over a year there and did very well with it, and I handled wheat procurement and purchasing and distribution on the market floors there in Minneapolis. But then I had a very good friend who the Rockefeller Foundation had given a large grant of money to establish an agricultural economics school at LSU, and he asked me to come back there as a better-paid graduate student. I was pretty poor the first time, and also, later, after the first year, I became an instructor in agricultural economics. I had taken some courses in agricultural economics, although I didn't know much about Southern agriculture.

But, anyway, I learned a great deal and did a number of studies and stayed there for a number of years, until 1941, actually, and I became an assistant professor of agricultural economics. By the way, the chief of that department was a man named Roscoe Seville. I don't think anybody knows about him anymore. He's no longer living.

But, anyway, I did receivthe Rockefeller Foundation sent me also to the University of Wisconsin to study land economics with a famous professor at that time, Carl Wehrwein and John Knight, and then they sent me also for a semester to the University of Chicago, and so I was pondering where I wanted to get a PhD, but then the war begin. And so since all my friends were drafted, but I was classified 4F because of nearsightedness, I accepted a job that had been offered to me in the USDA in Washington. And while I was in Washington, I finished up a long study I had done on rice marketing and industrialization and processing of rice, which added to my general studies at LSU, which had all been in trying to solve the problems of the displaced labor as the whole Mississippi Delta shifted to tractors and cotton production, and displaced the laborers, all of whom drifted to the North, and the sharecroppers' system was coming apart, to some extent.

And so the rice thing was the same thing and I worked with an agricultural engineer, both on a very advanced project sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, developing a combine for combining rice. Previous to that time, all rice was with a mower and not quite the hand chopping with the board, and shocking, and also the rice was processed all together by bagging it and drying it and trying to get it down to a moisture where you could put it through a mill.

So, I had all that material together and I put it together and in absentia submitted it to LSU, went back for my exams and did acquire a PhD there in agricultural economics. That's my educational background. But I also learned a great deal about rice, but I also did studies of the same type on sugar, particularly on harvesting and milling of sugar in Louisiana.

From there, I went to USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, but I didn't stay in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics too long. Well, I did in a sense, because they learned that I could write fairly well, so after a few months as an analyst in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, I became the editor of The Agricultural Situation, which doesn't exist anymore, I think, or does it exist?

Q: Its successor publication still very much exists, yes.

BOONSTRA: Well, I was the editor of that for about six months, until then the Commodity Credit Corporation needed someone handling some sugar and other commodity problems, and they also advanced me to a very high salary, so I went to Commodity Credit Corporation, but then the war began, and so I dropped everything and took my thesis and whatnot, and the Department of Statactually, I did not ask for the job. They came, because Paul Minneman, who was at that time the agricultural attachï¿½ in Cuba had more than his hands full, because he was working in a typical embassy at that time, which knew very little about things such as sugar, but sugar had become our principal problem in Cuba, so Paul was overloaded very heavily. And they assigned a vice consul, Charles Smith, as an assistant agricultural attachï¿½ to assist him, but he didn't know much about agriculture, either.

So Paul was putting the pressure on the State Department to employ someone who knew something about sugar and rice, particularly, and foodstuffs. So the Department of State came to the Department of Agriculture, and so they hired me, and that's how I happened to enter the Foreign Service Reserve at that time, as an assistant agricultural attachï¿½ to go to Cuba, primarily to work with sugar and rice.

But, when I arrived in Cuba, they had more than that. The War Shipping Administration controlled all shipping, and so Cuba, which was wholly dependent on imported foodstuffs at that time, because sugar was practically a monoculture there, and even the cattle industry was very small, although it was quite substantial in some places. They had no one in the embassy who could really assist Paul and all that, so that was my assignment, but then I also took care of war shipping problems in assigning foodstuffs, because all of the Caribbean islands had the same problem.

So it was a very, very interesting job. I happened to luck into, I guess, a very key job at the beginning of World War II, and I stayed there for three years, until '45, and I traveled throughout the Caribbean islands, mostly by military aircraft. We had bases all through the Caribbean, small bases, and also I could always hitch a ride somewhere because the embassy never had any money in those days for travel, particularly not outside of Cuba.

So it was a very interesting few years. I also became married at that time, to a Cuban girl, so I had to resign from the Foreign Service, but the State Department did not accept my resignation in those days, so she became an American citizen. So we worked that out, finally, but in 1945, after General MacArthur's forces entered Manila, they had a very similar problem in Manila.

I should have mentioned before, my problems in Cuba were very heavily related to the supply of rice to Cuba, because they had practically no rice-growing capacity installed, and so I did a lot to get the startup of the rice industry in Cuba, which is now quite a large industry, actually. So Paul really handled most of the sugar, but I also was responsible for the tradeoff that we had made by executive treaty that if they would supply us a certain amount of sugar, we'd guarantee them the supply of a certain amount of wheat, rice and lard. And so I was the officer in charge of the supply of that to Cuba.

The only thing I couldn't supply was one of their other favorite foods all through the Caribbean, including Cuba, which is bacalau from Canada and Iceland.

Q: What was that?

BOONSTRA: Bacalau is dried codfish.

Q: Dried codfish.

BOONSTRA: Dried codfish, in large slabs, they dry the whole fish. It's very interesting that the Caribbean, I found out in those days, as Garth I'm sure knows very well, that those islands, prior to World War II and most of them today, don't feed themselves at all. Cuba learned to feed itself to some extent during World War II, but the other islands have absolutely no foodstuffs. They live now on tourism, but formerly they lived on sugar, and were always a problem to the United States, because we wanted to restrict sugar supply from these old colonial islands, just as we always wanted to restrict sugar supply from Cuba. At that time, by the way, Louisiana was a larger producer than Florida. It was the main producer of sugar in the United States, other than the beet industry.

Q: When we chatted by telephone, you once talked about Commodity Credit Corporation teams coming down to buy tobacco, the CCC teams. Could you talk about that a bit?

BOONSTRA: Well, we also had a problem that the War Shipping Administration would not provide shipping for tobacco, but that became a little battle between the armed forces and the people who allocated foodstuffs for shipping and whatnot. But the Army wanted to buy enormous numbers of even cigars, and so had contracted with the Cuban factories for that, so we had to find shipping for that.

But on the production side of tobacco, Paul Minneman was quite an expert on that, particularly since he smoked it, I didn't. But, anyway, I had to get involved in tobacco purchases by the armed forces. So we had a rather large armed force base in Cuba for submarine patrol and so we had quite a bit of military in Cuba and quite a bit of transport of an airbase there, so that it was easy to get around.

I'm not sure just what I mentioned to you, but we had a lot of ...

Q: You said they used to come down to buy tobacco products and cigars in support of the war effort.

BOONSTRA: That's right. We bought cigars in the millions, so I did get to visit the cigar factories quite a bit, but I didn't smoke them myself.

Q: You also talked a bit about the work of an attachï¿½ in those days and the degree to which it is different from today in terms of collecting information. Some of the information you collected was on customs forms that the host country shippers had to fill out in order to export a product to the United States.

BOONSTRA: Oh, you mean the consular invoice.

Q: Right, the consular invoice. Could you talk about that a bit and how you collected that information and sent that to Washington?

BOONSTRA: Well, that was an aspect that has disappeared, of course, but during World War II and for a year or two after, the United States actually had traditionally always required that a consular invoice be made out in the port of departure of every foreign country for any cargoes going into the United States. It's hard to believe today. So the ship's captain, before he sailed from any port, had to come in to see the consular section, and the consular section always had a specialist in shipping, particularly in the large ports like Havana, so that every ship left Cuba in any port, the captain had to fill out a consular invoice and describe his entire cargo. Otherwise, he could not enter into the United States.

Now, that was not just a war policy. That was the long-existing policy of the consular invoice, so we had the detail on every ship that left any port, and he had to submit the consular invoice when he arrived at the port, and he had to go ashore and he had to get his consular invoice cleared and it was checked with his cargo. It was a very good system, but of course it wouldn't fit in today's world, where there's so much more traffic.

So, in a country such as Cuba, for example, the agricultural attachï¿½ would have had access to every bit of commercial merchandise that left any port. We kept all those figures, and since Cuba was an agricultural exporting country, mainly, of course, sugar, but a little bananas and a little citrus and occasionally a little winter vegetables, we always had our statistics all given to us from the consular invoices.

Of course, the government of Cuba didn't keep much in the way of accurate records on any of this stuff, so we had all the accurate records on all this.

Q: You were the de facto keeper of those records, then. Your data were the official data, then.

BOONSTRA: Yes, our consular invoices were regarded as much more official data than anything that was available. In fact, I don't think I ever bothered collecting the Cuban data, it was so bad, and that was the answer on that. And that applied to all products that left the port, including tobacco and everything else. In those days, everything left by ship. We didn't have any air invoices. But all that had to be abandoned after traffic became very heavy after World War II.

Well, I guess that pretty well covers the Cuba thing.

Q: Okay, well, then you went on to Manila. You stayed with State Department.

BOONSTRA: Yes, the interesting thing about that was after MacArthur entered Manila, someone of the State Department immediately wanted to send some staff up there, but MacArthur wouldn't admit anyone except a couple of consular officers to help clear prisoners out of the Santo Tomas Prison. Then the State Department also decided, they set up someone to look after the emerging food supplies and agricultural policy for the Philippines, and MacArthur reluctantlrather reluctantly, he didn't like civilians much, accepted that. So I went to the Philippines without much instructions of any sort, except to try to get along and do something useful there, I guess.

So when I arrived there, of course it was shortly after the takeover, so I arrived about the time the Japanese surrendered. And so I tried to be helpful, but we didn't have any organization. We had a couple of consular officers, so I helped them for a while to get prisoners out of Santo Tomas Prison, and then I gradually took over the responsibilities of trying to coordinate some of the agencies that were beginning to ship in food supplies. Fortunately, I was quite familiar with the main product, of course, which was rice. The rice industry had been messed up pretty badly by the Japanese. Particularly the sugar industry, which was concentrated on the island of Luzon, not far from Manila, had been totally destroyed by the Japanese. Completely and totally.

One of the big problems was what to do with rehabilitation policy, which everyone was in a hurry to rehabilitate. Manila was in total destruction. There was no place for me to live. I was located in the officers' barracks in the wreckage of the old Manila Hotel. In fact, when I moved into the hotel, there was still a Japanese machine gun in the closet. It had a big hole in the wall from a shell hole, which I closed with a zinc plate. I spent a day closing the hole, building myself a room, but then I was able to get my wife to come.

I had to make some trips back to Washington by plane, trying to find out whether my Cuban wife, who was now an American citizen, could come. The Department of Agriculture said whatever the State Department said was fine. So I went to the State Department and they said whatever the Army said was fine. They didn't know. The war was over and there weren't any women there, but no way to get a civilian woman there, so she joined the Red Cross and I got her on a troop ship, so she was one of the only wives in the Philippines at that time.

So, I moved her into the officers' quarters, which was against the rules, but we got away with it, and then MacArthur and the Army moved on to Japan, and they left me as the sole custodian of the wreckage of the Manila Hotel, since we turned that over to the emerging Philippine government, and so it took about two months before I could get rid of that and get someone else to occupy it, so we lived alone there. Although I did move in a Citibank representative to keep me company.

It was a pretty stormy time, and the main problems began to emerge as the time went on. Then Paul McNutt, who had been the prewar high commissioner of the Philippines came back as the postwar high commissioner. And his staff he recruited from all the old China hands and all the old Philippine colonial hands, and I began to run into a lot of trouble there, because among my other jobs, which were quite numerous around handling food things, was the big problem became what to do about the rehabilitation of the Philippines. And I did know enough about sugar, having had some experience both in Louisiana and Cuba, that sugar was not a good crop on the isle of Luzon. The soil was not good for it.

The Japanese had totally destroyed the whole structure of the industrrailroads, fields of cane. There was no seed cane, even. The mills had all been blown up. They were all gone. So there are good places in the Philippines to grow sugar, particularly the island of Negros, which is about the only one. But all MacArthur's friends and all McNutt's prewar colonial administration friends were there, and they had reinstalled all the old elite crowd, the old rulers, the old colonial rulers of the Philippines, who all wanted the sugar industry and the prewar structure done. So, quite different than his policy in Japan, MacArthur, who set up the post war structure, even though other people tried, but he was a dominant person, spent all of our rehabilitation money rehabilitating the sugar industry.

So I ran into a lot of trouble with McNutt'actually, I was working for McNutt then. I wasn't even with the State Department. I was a State Department officer, but I had an office down the hall from Paul McNutt and the high commissioner's more or less rehabilitated office structure.

So I got into a very conflict with his economic man, who was named Ed Hester, and so Paul McNutt called me in after I'd been there only about a year and a half or so and he said he tended to agree with me that agricultural policy, the money should not rehabilitate the sugar industry, which would further complicate, of course, our own industry. We were still having trouble about quotas. And that he had asked for my relief as agricultural attachï¿½, and so he was very nice about it.

He said he was sorry for me to go, because I had become very good friends with Paul McNutt, but he said he had had Ed Hester working with him before the war, and Ed Hester wanted the sugar industry rehabilitated. And the Philippine governmenafter all, he had installed a fellow named Osmena, who had been the prewar president, and then had elected a new president, Manuel Roxas. And so I was honored really, because before I left, the president of the Philippines, Manuel Roxas, called me in for a private visit, and actually it was the most private visit I've ever had with a president. He took his shoes off and had his feet on the desk and it was very informal, indeed, in the old Malacaï¿½ang Palace, which had been spared, by the way, by the Japanese and by MacArthuin both cases, by the way, because it's next door to the San Miguel Brewery and both armies wanted to keep the brewery intact.

The moment when our troops came in Manila, the first objective was the Army Navy Club. The second objective was to take the San Miguel Brewery next to the Malacaï¿½ang Palace so that it didn't get damaged in the takeover, one of the only undamaged places, the Malacaï¿½ang Palace and the San Miguel Brewery.

President Roxas even told me, he said, "I know a good bit about agriculture. You're right, really. The best future for the Philippines is not to try to restore that industry," but, he said, "That's what all the political forces want and it's something that I have to do." He said, "High Commissioner McNutt has told me that you're leaving because he doesn't want this conflict in the embassy, which we had set up on July 4, 1946."

So I was sort of in a way fired, I guess, but it was interesting. But it was a matter if policy, and it was very interesting, because years later, about 1950s or so, there was a Bell committee, which called me back to Washington, and I testified. They were examining why we had made this bad decision in our War Damages Act and how it could be undone, and they had read one of my dispatches in those days, one of the dispatches in which I strongly pointed out that this was a bad rehabilitation strategy. So, suddenly, it all came out well, which helped my reputation a good bit.

So I came back to Washington and I was supposed to go to Turkey, but something had happened there, and so I ended up in Peru, and in Peru, again, got into all sorts of problems. They had a very bad ambassador at that time, a fellow named Prentice Cooper. When I arrived there, he told me that an agricultural attachï¿½, that the only use he had for an agricultural attachï¿½, he said in Perhe said he didn't like Jack Haggerty, who had been my predecessor, and Haggerty didn't like him either.

Anyway, he told me that Haggerty wouldn't take care of his garden, and so my chief job as agricultural attachï¿½ in the embassy was to restore his garden and to improve the lawn. I got in bad right away because I said, "I may know a little bit about agriculture, but I know nothing about lawns." My home in Michigan, we had very little lawn. We had orchards around it.

So I ended up in Peru, but then we got into problems with the Rubber Development Corporation, which had bought two plantations in the Huallaga Valley. That's across the Andes, on the other side, and we had also put in a research station for rubber and cinchona during the war, called Tingo Maria. I'm sure Garth has heard about that.

But Tingo Maria, they had no director at that time, so I sort of became the acting director of Tingo Maria, trying to piece together what we should do with a research station for rubber and cinchona, which the Department of Agriculture didn't want anymore and we wanted to get rid of, and the Rubber Development Corporation had two rubber plantations that they didn't want anymore. And the Peruvian government didn't want to pay anything for them, and somebody in Washington said they had to pay to get them, so we got into an endless problem there, and I spent about a year really as sort of the acting director of Tingo Maria, which is across the mountains and made me go back and forth a lot, which was sort of good because I could get away from the ambassador that way.

The ambassador then gave me another task. There was a fellow named Richard Schultes. Have you ever heard of Dick Schultes? He was a Harvard botanist, a very famous one. He died about a month ago. He was very, very famous for tropical research. And so Dick Schultes from Harvard was doing research down there quite a bit in the same area where we had the Tingo Maria station, so I spent a lot of time with him and I learned a great deal about tropical agriculture and tropical forestry, tropical botany, traveling with him. And he used to stay with me in Tingo Maria, a very remote part of the world in that time. There was only a little jeep trail to get in there, and you had to pass at 14,000 feet between Lima and there, so it was a very, very interesting job for me, and I really liked being in Tingo Maria so I could be away from the ambassador, but I had to be away from my wife, too, who was in Lima.

So I spent about two years there, a little over two years, and it was a very interesting job. Oh, I said the ambassador gave me another assignment. He said second to taking care of his lawn, which I didn't do very well, I can assure you. St. Augustine grass just arrived at that time, so I tried planting that. It didn't work too well in Lima. Anyway, the other job he gave me, Schultes was also collecting for the Harvard bank, he was collecting these many, many strains of corn for the high Andes. You can get red corn, you can get purple corn, you can get black corn. You can get mixed color corn, all that sort of stuff, and it entranced the ambassador.

He said, "I have one other job for you. I want a collection of all these plants that I know exist in this corn and that I see in the market." So he wanted a collection of that. He also wanted a collection of tropical parrots, which I had to get for him. The other job was along the same lines, all sort of weird things like that, so I had to please this ambassador, who finally got fired.

It always amused me, though, when he got fired, we all went to the cayo, to the port, to see him off in the ship. We wanted to make sure he got on the ship. I think he was finally fired mainly for sexual assaults on his secretary, but, anyway, the only things he was carrying were some of the rare parrots that I had brought him from Kita, in the tropical forest area. So I guess I gave him his trophies. Later on, the guy straightened out after his mother died. He was a bachelor and he had sexual problems.

The job opened up there then in Argentina, and I've been trying to ponder, my immediate predecessor was the editor of Wallace's Journal in Iowa. I can't remember his name for some strange reason. [Arthur Thompson]

Q: Was that Guy Bush?

BOONSTRA: No, no, no. This fellow had been there for about three years before I got there, but, anyway, he was very good, left a good office there. But that was a very large office, because in Argentinl arrived in Argentina in 1949, and in Argentina the big problem was Peron, and the blocks he was putting on shipments of grain to Europe. Both of you are too young to recall, but at that time Europe was in a very bad condition for grain supplies, so the big problem for me as agricultural attachï¿½, and even for my predecessor also, but it became bigger while I was there, Argentina was just loaded with grain. They had huge open piles in the wheat area and corn, also, just under plastic.

They'd dig big holes and line them with cement and put tarpaulins over the top and there was grain all over Argentina, but they wanted to extort the highest possible price from whoever was paying for it. And the United States, particularly, had the Marshall Plan, of course, we were paying for it all. Also, the United States didn't have enough grain to supply all the demands at that time, so I found myself very much involved in the grain trade there, trying to maneuver the Peron government, which was very hostile to us at that time, into supplying more of its grain. But they wanted to maneuver for higher prices, so I got in the middle of all of this grain trading business, which was my principal occupation over three years in Argentina. It eased off, of course, after 1951.

That brought me into close touch with the Peron government, which was not having much to do with the American government, but I had to work very closely with the Peron government. I was very fortunate in this case, because Peron and his government would not even invite our ambassador, or even our deputy chief of mission, to any of their affairs or have any communications with them. But since the Peron government had to sort of deal with me, and since my wife was Cuban, and even Evita, the only person in the embassy with whom she would deal was my wife. And I was agricultural attachï¿½, of course.

I found my years in Argentina largely as the chief communicator with the Peron government for the embassy.

Q: Unbelievable.

BOONSTRA: Which these are unusual circumstances, all caused by World War II, of course. I also had some very good colleagues there. I can't quite remember their names. The British had a very, very fine, very competent grain man there. The Dutch embassy also had a very competent man, and he later becamoddly, he was the Dutch agricultural attachï¿½ there in Argentina. He later became an American agricultural attachï¿½. I don't know whether you knew that or not.

Q: No, I'd never heard that story.

THORBURN: Beukenkamp?

BOONSTRA: What's that?

THORBURN: Beukenkamp?

BOONSTRA: [Radboud] Beukenkamp.

THORBURN: Robaird Beukenkamp.

BOONSTRA: Where did you know him?

THORBURN: He was in FAS (Foreign Agricultural Service).

BOONSTRA: Oh, in FAS. Do you know how he got to be in FAS?

Q: No, I don't.

BOONSTRA: This is very interesting. Bob became a friend of mine. In fact, he used to tell mhe was a good friend of Evita also. They cultivated her a great deal, including passing money to her for a foundation, which I couldn't do. The Dutch had fewer scruples. The British used to complain bitterly to me that the Dutch were getting grain away from them.

Bob was agricultural attachï¿½ there and in a couple of other countries, very competent by the way, but he has a very violent temper. Did you know that?

THORBURN: Yes.

BOONSTRA: Just a flash temper.

THORBURN: We'd get that, yes, sometimes.

BOONSTRA: It's interesting, because he gets in trouble in every job. But, anyway, I met him next later on iquite a few years later in Mexico. We played tennis a great deal together, where he was working for FMI, for a private corporation. He was heading a private corporation, got in trouble with them, too. Then he went back to Washington and didn't have a job, so I wrote him a letter of recommendation, and I pointed out he was a very competent man, but watch out for his temper.

So he went to work for Foreign Agriculture in Washington, and he was very valuable to them because he's a very bright man. He spoke six different languages fluently, and he also had quite a reputation. I happened to have learned, actually, he was a member of the Dutch Resistance during World War II in the war, and had some pretty wild experiences during that he's told me a lot of stories about, I won't repeat here. But he's also sailed small boats across the Atlantic. He's a very good tennis player, and he's a concert-class pianist. Very odd.

But, anyway, I helped him get a job in FAS, where he was very valuable as an interpreter, so he began traveling all over as an interpreter, and then he became an American citizen. Well, he became an American citizen before he went to FAS, of course, as soon as he went to the States. He became an American citizen and then he became our attachï¿½, I believe, in Italy and Brazil and maybe more. I don't know. Interesting fellow.

Q: That's interesting. I have never heard that story.

BOONSTRA: He finally ended up here in Shalimar in Florida. And after we were both retired, we used to visit together a good bit, so we remained friends until he died from a heart attack. But I just received a card from his widow, Tina, for Christmas. Anyway, he was a very unusual agricultural attachï¿½.

Q: That is unusual.

BOONSTRA: But he lost all of his jobs because of his violent temper. It would flare up. He'd get over it, and then he'd get very angry at me, sometimes, too.

Anyway, the Argentine experience was very interesting because of this relationship we had with the Perons, and we learned a lot about them. For example, when they had a function at the Casa Rosada, which is the capital building at their home, the only person who would be invited from the embassy would be the agricultural attachï¿½, a little unusual.

So then we moved on. After a couple of years, we had a very, very noted agricultural economist, John Hopkinhave you ever heard that name?

Q: I've seen the name in the listing, but I don't know anything about him.

BOONSTRA: Well, he was the author of all the books on foreign management 10 years ago when foreign management was a big thing in agricultural economics. When I first started, of course, that's where most of agricultural economics started, was in the foreign management courses that are taught in colleges of agriculture, which then expanded into agricultural economics, generally.

So John Hopkins had been in Brazil several years, and I guess he wanted to go to Argentina, so in 1953 I was transferred frohe was the agricultural attachï¿½ in Brazil, so we traded jobs. He came to Argentina and I went to Brazil in 1953. I arrived there at a rather upset time. The Eisenhower administration had just placed in a new ambassador called Jim Kemper, who was an extremely wealthy former treasurer of the Republican National Party and a good friend of all the big Republicans. So he had this job, but the first time he'd ever been much abroad, and he had his own objectives there.

Also, there was a coffee drought, so I traveled around Brazil a lot, particularly on coffee. I had to learn a lot about coffee, which I did. I did things which are not permitted today. For example, the embassy had no travel funds, of course, at that time still for agricultural attachï¿½ to do much travel, and the only way I could really get a decent estimate on coffee was to really visit all the coffee areas and do a lot of ground work myself. So Anderson Clayton, which was at that time the big coffee buyethey don't even exist anymore, at one time also the coffee buyers. They loaned me an airplane for three weeks.

Q: That's how you got around?

BOONSTRA: It's the only way I could get around is a small little Cessna that they had. A funny thing, we couldn't accept that anymore, could we?

Q: No.

BOONSTRA: By all means. Anyway, I cleared it with the Department of Agriculture, and they said, if it's the only way you can get an estimate, you've got to do it. But it was a big country, and I had two assistants there, Glenn Rugglehave you ever heard of him?

Q: Yes.

BOONSTRA: And a very, very fine man, who later became a good agricultural attachï¿½, Paul Ferree.

Q: Paul married a Brazilian lady.

BOONSTRA: Yes, he had a miserable end to all these years. I'll tell you, Paul Ferree was very, very good. He married a Brazilian there while I was there, too. In fact, I was his best man. Anyway, that was a very nice tour, but the problem was that since coffee was at that time the lifeblood of Brazicertainly isn't anymore, thank goodnesit was the lifeblood of Brazil, Kemper became interested in coffee, too. And, also, they were nationalizing petroleum and that sort of thing. He had an economic counselor who was not too well and was out much of the time, so in effect Kemper made me more or less the acting economic counselor, which is a very large economic section.

Of course, I was a Foreign Service officer, working for the Department of Agriculture as agricultural attachï¿½, which is the title I had, but I spent most of those yearthen we had some big problems in Brazil after the long-time dictator, President Vargas, committed suicide.

In fact, I was one of only two officers when a mob marched, began firing bullets in the embassy, along with a Marine guard. But after Vargas died, killed himself, and the government was in turmoil, the government was about to fall in a monetary sense and the economic counselor was not in too good shape. I became the chief adviser in the embassy on monetary affairs for Kemper.

In fact, I went back and forth to Washington with a team of the new president's special advisers, one of whom I still correspond with a great deal. I became, dealing with the Export-Import Bank and all the monetary people, I sort of vanished, but I had good people, particularly Paul Ferree, who were handling most of the agriculture. But, anyway, I was working directly for the ambassador on all of these monetary affairs. And about that time, in 1954, the Department of Agriculture decides to separate, which was not a bad idea. I had no opposition to the idea at all, because I had kept on being drawn off.

In Brazil, at least, I was being drawn off into all these other matters, so it was a very easy choice for me. Obviously, my career was much better directed staying as economic counselor in Brazil and not advancing in the Foreign Service, which was a fairly easy choice. I didn't leave as an agricultural attachï¿½ because I didn't want to be an agricultural attachï¿½ anymore, but mainly because my whole career had been bent constantly in other directions, so I chose at that time to remain in the State Department.

BOONSTRA (to Thorburn): Were you in in '54, at that time?

THORBURN: I came into FAS in '54.

BOONSTRA: So you had to make a choice?

THORBURN: No, no, I came out of the Army. I had graduated from the university and I was in the Army. In '54, after the act of 1953, they hired 10 junior professionals, and I was one of the junior professionals.

BOONSTRA: Oh, I see.

Thorburn: And I ended up in Brazil in '61, and I was in Sao Paulo from '61 to '66.

BOONSTRA: You were in Sao Paulo '51 and '52?

THORBURN: No, '61 to 66.

BOONSTRA: Oh, '61. Yes, I didn't think I'd ever met you there.

THORBURN: No, no, but I saw in the files in Sao Paulo, I saw some of the work that you did, because we had some copies of the reports that were signed by you.

BOONSTRA: And, actually, Sao Paulo, one of the problems always was that Sao Paulo was more the center of the coffee trade than Rio, and then Santos.

THORBURN: And Sao Paulo.

BOONSTRA: But, anyway, that was my career as an agricultural attachï¿½, and I didn't return to it, but I always remained in close touch. So, would you like to have me say something about subsequent assignments?

Q: The subsequent assignments I think are pretty much covered in the oral history that we already have.

BOONSTRA: But not from an agricultural point of view. I'll make a few remarks.

Q: Okay.

BOONSTRA: From there, I went back to Cuba as economic counselor, which made my wife very happy, and which made me happy. And, while I was in Cuba, actually, we decided that as soon as I reached 50 and could retire under the State Department rules, we decided that we were going to live in Cuba. So we bought a home with my wife's father-in-law, and we shared a farm down there, and I was going to wait. I was in my early 40s and I was going to work until 50, and then we were going to go back to our home in Cuba, but things turned out differently.

The agricultural attachï¿½ there at that time was a fellow named Chester Davis. Chester had come there during the war the first time I was in Cuba, as whatever agency, the office of something or other, that boughhe was a purchasing agent for lots of things, including cigars. But Chester was then the agricultural attachï¿½ there, and he stayed on for a long time. You probably have recorded him.

My plans got all upset when Castro arrived. My wife's sister had married the president of the Nicaro Nickel Company, which was our big nickel operation in Cuba. And some congressman, or actually Drew Pearson ran a thing in the column about me sayinat that time some problems had arisen. I was actually chargï¿½ d'affaires at one time there. He wrote that the American chargï¿½ d'affaires, which was a fellow like Castro there, had a Cuban wife and had too many interests in Cuba and at that time said her sister had something favorable about Cuba. And so Drew Pearson set off a torrent in the Congress thathat said something favorable about Cuba, that they had a chargï¿½ d'affaires in Cuba who was favorable to Castro, and the State Department got clobbered for it. So I got ordered to leave immediately.

Well, my ambassador at that time, who was a nice guy, Arthur Gardnedidn't know anything about Cubso he actually sent me up to his friends in the White House who said, "Look what the State Department is doing to me. I'm here in Cuba and have got all these problems on my hand and you're sending the only man who speaks Spanish and his wife..."

So they gave me another four months to get out of there. They didn't know what to do with me, I guess, because they had bad publicity about me, so the sent me to the National War College for a year, which was very pleasant. I enjoyed that. But then I went back to the State Department as director of South American affairs, and I stayed there a couple of years. But then my wife died, and meanwhile Castro had seized my father-in-law's farm. I got him out of Cuba, finally, and also seized my house, but I beat him to it, because I defaulted on the mortgage and so it was the Royal Bank in Canada that took the hit. That's my picture of my house in Cuba. It was painted by my wife, who died. That's why I keep that there.

So, anyway, that's a painful memory. I stayed there for several years, but then my wife died in Washington and the State Department was very good to me. I wanted to get out of the State Department. I didn't know what to do, but I had lost my house, I had no money, I had a couple of children. They arranged very nicely for me to go as political adviser to the armed forces in Panama. At that time, we called it Caribbean Command, now the Southern Command. We changed the name while I was there.

I got along very well with them, and it gave me a chance to travel all over and to try to reform the School of the Americas, which I lectured at that school every week when I was in Panama. But I spent a couple of very profitable years there, and I met Margaret there, who was in the embassy, my wife, whom you've met. We didn't marry then. We married later.

But, anyway, spent a couple of years there, and then had a chance to go to Mexico as deputy chief of mission there, which was just before Kennedy's assassination. So, then, that post was open for a while so I was chargï¿½ d'affaires in Mexico for quite a while, which is the best experience I had. That was a better job than Costa Rica to tell the truth, but you can only stay so long, and I really liked my skill.

So from there I was named ambassador to Costa Rica. That was very interesting. In Costa Rica, people are very pleasant, but there really aren't anI'd been used to working hard. Costa Rica was just sort of like an endless vacation. It was not a problem, at that time, with many problems, but I did manage to get myself in trouble, though. Because then, when Nixon was elected, I had always worked mostly with the Democratic Party, I guess, except for Eisenhower, and when Nixon was elected, he sent a team down to Latin America, which in accord with State Department instructions and all that, I had more or less assisted the United Fruit Company to settle a lot of its problems with the unions there. One of the major irritations in Costa Rica was in the banana industry. I learned a lot about the banana industry, too, then.

I was assisting at the American Institute for Free Labor Development. You've heard of that one, which was very much sponsored by George Meany and by the Kennedy administration, and by the Johnson administratiothe Johnson administration particularly. And so I got a lot of enemies, because the union then began its activities with Standard Fruit Company, which was growing fruit on the east side, the Caribbean side, in a really much more competitive area than the United Fruit's holdings on the Pacific side.

So, anyway, I got accused by the Nixon administration of being a Communist, because I was assisting the AIFLD with these union organizations and the Rockefeller mission came down and they sent a fellow named Cannon. In fact, while I was out with Rockefeller doing goodwill things, Nelson Rockefeller, this guy Cannon was getting all this stuff about the Communist American ambassador, so I got jerked out of there in a hurry.

And then, once again having nothing to do, I became a diplomat in residence at the University of Colorado. It's a very pleasant year, again. I have to give the State Department credit. They do some very nice things for people who get in a lot of trouble. Then we had Burke Elbrick, the ambassador in Brazil, before I finished my year at the University of Colorado, Burke was one of the first attempted assassinations of an ambassador. The chauffeur was killed, but he was kidnapped. In fact, there's a movie about it, if you ever saw that, three days and something or other.

He was kidnapped, but he was not seriously injured in the process, and, finally, he was released, but he was not a well man, and when he got to State Department, they couldn't give him a clearance to go back to Brazil, and the Brazilian government on the other hand said that he had incited these revolutionists and they had captured a tape recording that Burke had made when he talked with them in which he said he sort of agreed with him. A lot of things were very bad in Brazil, and they were, under the military government. So the Brazil government said they wouldn't take him back in any case, and the deputy chief of mission had just resigned and there was no one heading the embassy except of low rank. So they jerked me out of the University of Colorado because I could speak Portuguese, and also it so happened that the foreign minister was an old friend of mine from the first time I was in Brazil. He was now foreign minister.

So they sent me back to Brazil, and the student group vowed to assassinate me or kidnap me, immediately, so I didn't go back to Rio de Janeiro, where the embassy was still officially established. I took a plane from Washington with my family and arrived in Brasilia, which pleased the Brazilian government to no end, because they had tried to get the missions to move to Brasilia and they wouldn't move to this raw village up there.

We had a little small building out there, so I arrived in Brasilia and I announced that the American embassy was the first embassy to move to Brasilia, which made the Brazilians very happy, so I was in their good graces immediately. But then all our embassy was in Rio, so then I had to go to Rio anyway, where I was met with a rather large force of Brazilian military to escort me to the residence.

Q: I wanted to ask you a few questions, rather mundane questions, about reporting and the work you did from the standpoint of how different things are today, where today we use electronic forms for reporting, we communicate as you and I have communicated, by long-distance telephone, by electronic mail, whereas when you were in Cuba, when you were in Peru, how did you report to Washington and what were the mechanics of getting information back to Washington.

[James E. Ross joins.]

BOONSTRA: Jim, he was asking about how we used to communicate. Jim is still familiar with that, and I think Garth is probably too, to some extent. But it's so long ago you're going to have to ask a question about how we communicated.

Q: Well, I'll give you a little background. Going back into some of my historical research, I have come across references that in 1923 the offices in London and Berlin were given permission to use Navy radio facilities to send radiograms back to Washington, DC, but that the majority of the information was sent back through the diplomatic pouch. And I also saw a reference in the 1950s to increased reporting by telegram, except that telegrams were so expensive that the attachï¿½s were encouraged only to report those last-minute changes to the production, supply and distribution balances to come in before a circular was published. We were still encouraged to send most of our reports by diplomatic pouch, because that was cheap. So, could you talk a little bit about how you did your reporting and who you sent it to and just how that whole system worked.

BOONSTRA: Well, you've described a good bit of it, already. But when I first went to Cuba, we wrote dispatches addressed to the Department of State and for the Department of Agriculture. We would duplicate it, believe it or not, by mimeograph, a very painful procedure. And once or twice a week, a courier came through and we sent them up to Washington. Later, the mimeograph was discarded for what they called a hectograph, these purple copies. So we were doing the same thing with a hectograph.

Everything had to be written out and typed by secretaries and then duplicated on these two different types of machines. In the Philippines, it was the same way, except we had access through military communications for radio, but we had to use it very sparingly. So, if you wanted to telephone, we had to always get clearance from the ambassador's office, because we only had a limited long distance budget. So you were very much limited on your telephone calls.

We didn't have the radio, although in most embassies, we had the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and once in a while, in an emergency, the ambassador only could use the FBI communications systems. And when the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was established later, the ambassador was permitted to use the CIA communications, but nobody else was, so you couldn't do this with your agriculture attachï¿½ work or anything else. So we kept on sending these dispatches. Later, they changed to what we called airgrams, and the airgram was a report that was done the same way, originally by hectograph, and then later dispatched through courier. So the airgrams became a very familiar object.

Then, for a long time, we had to sum up all the news once a week in something called a Weeka, which was a hectographed airgram from all sections, giving the highlights of each week, which went to the State Department and copies went to FAS. For example, I could not, in Cuba or in the Philippines, certainly not in the Philippines, or in Peru or even in Argentina or Brazil, as agricultural attachï¿½, I could not use the telephone without getting clearance from a higher level, because it had to be on the embassy budget, not on the Agriculture budget. It had to be on the State Department budget, so your calls were very, very limited. Well, it was very difficult to communicate.

That whole business, by the way, began to change primarily when the Kennedy administration took over. Kennedy was horrified that he couldn't communicate with his ambassadors directly, so he authorized the installation of a more modern system. This was way back in 1961. At that time, I was in Panama with a commanding general called Andy O'Meara, General O'Meara, and he had always been in Europe, and he said, "This is awful." He said even in the military, all the military had was what did we call it, double bandwidth?

Q: Single sideband?

BOONSTRA: Yes, that's right. He said, "On our military missions, all we have is that radio, and it's a very bad setup." So he immediately embarked, within the two years I was with him, on modernizing radio communications for the military, which the ambassadors would be permitted to use, and sometimes some of the staff. I doubt whether agricultural attachï¿½s got much access to it in embassies, but the military missions began building up their communications, and the Kennedy administration then began authorizing approved communications. And the State Department began putting more money in their budgets for telephone and for wire messages.

They were building new cables into Latin America, but also one of the big factors was what we called the Navy radio, Radio Rio. We had one of our whole big communications centers set up during World War II. In the South Atlantic was a very powerful communications system that we set up in Rio de Janeiro, and that controlled communications all through Latin America. And, gradually, when I was in Brazil, we began using Radio Rio, but even then you couldn't send an agricultural dispatch through it. It still had to go by courier and by airgram. But the system was a very clumsy and odd system, but it must have seemed fantastic to people in this world.

On the other hand, I know nothing about your current communications and I can't quite imagine how it is in today's world. It must be very, very different.

Q: We'll talk about that this afternoon, if you like.

BOONSTRA: Yes, I wish you would.

Q: Maybe if you could talk a little bit about some of the personalities in OFAR (Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations) and maybe talk a little bit about FAR and what you know about it as an organization, and then some of the people who ran it. We've talked a little bit about Les Wheeler. You talked a little bit about Jack Haggerty just now. If you could talk about the people you knew, and also about FAR's evolution that you discussed when we talked on the phonbetween 1941 and 1943, how it was transformed into a much larger and more important agency of government.

BOONSTRA: That's quite a large subject. I wanted to ask you one question first. I mentioned some names of agricultural attachï¿½s. I don't know whether I ever mentioned Hubert Maness. Do you have him on your list?

Q: He's on the list, but we don't know much about him.

BOONSTRA: Well, a rather interesting story, when I was loaded down in the Philippines, he arrived there as my assistant agricultural attachï¿½, and then later on, when I was in Argentina, he became the agricultural attachï¿½ in Uruguay and he married an Uruguay girl, and he became a rather large operator as an estanciero, raising cattle in Uruguay, but then he died quite a few years ago, but he was married to an Uruguayan.

On the other subject, I also wanted to ask you aboul can't remember the name, one of my best friends in the early years of Foreign Agriculture was somebody named Ross.

Q: Fred Rossiter.

BOONSTRA: What's that?

Q: Fred Rossiter.

BOONSTRA: No, not Fred Rossiter.

Q: Not Fred Rossiter?

BOONSTRA: His first name was Ross. Was it Ross Johnson by any chance?

Q: Are you thinking of Rex Johnson?

BOONSTRA: No, Rex Johnson.

Q: Rex Johnson, yes.

BOONSTRA: No, it was not Ross, it was Rex.

Q: Dr. A. Rex Johnson, who was hired to be assistant director of FAR, and then he left about 1950 and went out to teach at one of the universities.

BOONSTRA: Well, actually, he was one of my closest contacts. I saw a great deal of him. Fred Rossiter, as I think I mentioned to you already, was also one of my closest contacts, always was, because he was the one man in Washington who would always get things done for us. He was a remarkably competent person.

As I also mentioned, Les Wheeler, I knew, but not very well, because as I mentioned earlier, also, his job before World War II, when I was hired, seemed to be more of an assistant to the secretary of agriculture than it did to really running a big agency because the agency was just being formed at that time.

Gus Burmeister was also a principal person for us and was for some time and he was one of the early people to come also from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. So the only people I really knew at that time were that group. My old college roommate became one of the outstanding commodity people, Horace Porter. Did you ever hear of his name?

Horace was one of the students, was the only Southern student recruited in that first crowd at LSU, and he went to FAS along with me. I mean, he went to Washington along with me and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. He was a cotton specialist, and then he became the tobacco specialist when Foreign Agriculture was formed. Then he became the cotton specialist, and then in my last few years in Brazil and Costa Rica, my old roommate from LSU would be visiting me as a traveling cotton specialist. And you must have known Horace.

Did you know him, Jim?

ROSS: No, I didn't.

BOONSTRA: He's not well, now. He's still alive, I think, but he's had a stroke and he's in bad shape. But, to tell the truth, I didn't deal a great deal probably began dealing more with State Department and military people, and that's why I drifted off into this stance where I was when the change came in '54, because I was already doing more State Department work than I was doing agricultural work.

The agriculture, the form at that time was, of course, that the embassies had very little knowledge of agricultural people, and suddenly during World War II they became very important to the embassy and couldn't do very much of their own agricultural work anymore. Even Paul Minneman in Cuba, for example, was doing more embassy work on the sugar and the commodity work than he was doing the kind of agricultural attachï¿½ work that you people do now. So the whole structure changed.

Before World War II, the agricultural commissioners were quite separate people from the embassies. They were not particularly closely related. They may have been an attachï¿½, but they ran their own offices pretty much, and most of the time they were not even located in the embassy, because they had the chancery. The chancery was only for the embassy elite, and the agricultural commissioner was not one of them as a rule, not always.

There were very few people that were very close to the embassy at that time, and they ran their own office pretty independently, as agricultural commissioners. In World War II, suddenly the State Department had a desperate need for people on their staff, because the embassy was all involved with regulating all of these different agencies. So the agricultural attachï¿½s during World War II became suddenly very, very important to the embassies.

Then, later, by 1954, when they separated, which is the agricultural attachï¿½ was not that immediately important in war and postwar problems, and reverted back to really an agricultural thing, but they already had such an important role in most countries, which they had begun to recognize, particularly in developing countries, as well as in the advanced countries. The work has been very different, even today. For example, in your country, it's a great deal different, I'm sure, than where Garth served, for example. And in England it is drastically different from somebody in the Congo, so agricultural attachï¿½s have our own very highly diversified role, but all are recognized now as very important to the embassies.

It's very difficult to assess just what the State Department embassies, our Foreign Service, was before World War II. Almost all the officers were Harvard, Yale or Princeton graduates. They wouldn't even have thought of having an LSU graduate there, for example, or Michigan State. Then, during World War II, they had to enlarge it, and later on, these elite groups, who by the way were not particularly competent, a lot of them, began to decline.

But I was abroad all the time when I was an agricultural attachï¿½, so I wasn't in close contact with Foreign Agriculture in Washington to a great deal.

Q: Could you talk maybe a little bit about some of the comments you made about Wolf Ladejinsky and his work in Japan, and then later there was the Red Scare when he was forced out of being an agricultural attachï¿½ in 1954, and what you recall from that period?

BOONSTRA: Well, I recall that quite well, because, you see, we were on the same side in the Philippines.

I think I wrote this to you, Wolf was a rather sort of wildcard anyway, and I had known him before World War II and around Washington. He never could get anyone to buy his ideas about land reform and really it's in a sense quite a socialist approach to land. So, then I lost touch with him, but when I went to the Philippines, he came down to visit me a couple of times, because he could use military transportation, and I couldn't. It was interesting, the thing was that because MacArthur was part of the old society in the Philippines, he tried to reconstruct the Philippines by putting all of his old friends in, the old politicians, the old sugar people. He tried to restore the old system, which after all had been on our side throughout the war, and they were the moneyed group, and did nothing to change the social structure at all.

But then he went to Japan, and in Japan, of course, they were the defeated enemy, and so he decided to change their whole social and political structure, which he did, including land reform, in a big way, and I never quite figured out how Wolf got the job of doing it. Because Wolf had this drastic land reform, which has been very successful in Japan, which really the land shape was not too bad before, or at least it was productive before.

But in the Philippines, of course, the whole agricultural system was totally destroyed. All the sugar mills, the sugar industry, was totally destroyed. The tobacco industry was half destroyed. The rice industry was half destroyed. The Japanese had really been brutal as they withdrew through the Philippines, they just destroyed everything. They bombed everything. Everything was destroyed. It was really a country in total ruin.

But the people in charge were the old people, and they wanted to rebuild the same thing, and MacArthur endorsed that. He had set it up, as a matter of fact. He even chose their president. People don't really know that, but Manuel Roxas was an old guerilla leader that he happened to like, and he was a pretty good guy. But in Japan, Wolf had a free hand, so he came down and he read my policy, that the sugar industry should not be restored, because it's a natural rice growing area and it had all been occupied by small farmers. And also, within a year after we took the Philippines back, there was a large insurgency movement called the Hukbalahaps.

The Hukbalahaps I happened to learn a lot about, particularly since, as I told you, I was on New Year's Eve of 1947, I was kidnapped by a party of the Hukbalahaps. I had gone up to one of the sugar plantations being restored with a Spaniard. I've even forgotten his name, who was the manager for Tabacalero, the big Spanish conglomerate. Tabacalero used to be a very famous company, which had this huge sugar mill, which most of it was American sugar mills, American financed, but they also had this Tabacalero.

And we had gone up for the New Year's Eve, and we had quite a party. I think we all had drunk too much champagne. But, anyway, we were up on a hill about a mile away from the workers' village of this huge plantation and about midnight, all of the lights went out in the village suddenly. They were running on generators provided by the company, of course, emergency generators.

They all went out, and then we heard quite a bit of gunshot down below there. We were about a mile up there on the side of a hill, and we heard a lot of gunshots down there, but he said, "Well, the best thing we can do is turn off our generator and we'll be in the dark, but we've still got two bottles of champagne to go." So, anyway, we kept on drinking champagne until about 3:00 in the morning. But then I woke up suddenly at dawn and saw my host, the Tabacalero representative, through the window. The window had been shot out so it was easy to talk to hibad for the mosquitoes, though.

He was loading his jeep and putting a rifle up. The crossbar, it was of course a U.S. military jeep, and I asked him what he was doing. He said he was going down to see if there were any refugees he could pick up and help them out, since we hadn't done anything the night before when we heard the gunshots.

So I asked him if I could go with him, and he said, "Yeah, if you want to." So we drove down to the village and the village people were around there. It was early in the morninand said that the raiding party had gone down the road, the Hukbalahap. They called themselves the Hukbalahaps, this whole insurgent movement through the Philippines. They said, "They got out of here about two hours ago and they took all our rice and all our food supplies, and they had a couple of trucks." Army trucks, of course. Everybody stole Army trucks and things like that.

He said, "Well, let's go down the road and see if we can pick up any people that they might have left behind." Well, they took about 10 hostages.

They took about 10 hostages, but we found the hostages walking back, so we didn't know just how many hostages there were, and we kept on going down this little dirt road with Mount Ararat in the distance as the only mountain on the rice plain. We got down the road and rounded a curve and found all these 15 or 20 rifles pointed at us, as we rounded the curve. So all of a sudden, we were the hostages. They didn't know quite what to do. They hadn't expected this little haul, so, anyway, they took the rifle we had there, a carbine, and while they would think of what to do with us, they took us along with them. This was early morning.

So they started up the trucks and we headed for their camp at Mount Ararat, they told us. Well, they knew there was a big insurgency camp up there. We headed down the road and we got to talk to them, and the Spanish fellow also spoke the local languages there, which I didn't, but they all spoke a bit of Spanish and some English.

Anyway, I talked to them all day and I found they weren't too bad guys. I got their whole history, really, had been a band that had been fighting the Japanese all through the war on the American side and really they didn't want the sugar industry to come back, because they were opposed to the sugar industry. They had planted little gardens themselves and they also had a lot of supplies coming in during the war, because they were always raiding the Japanese outposts and getting food and supplies and weapons. Now, they heard the sugar industry was coming back and they weren't having anything to do with it, and so they were an insurgent group.

McNutt and all the embassy people were calling them Communists, which I don't think there was a Communist in the group, or who knew what Communism was all about, but they were an insurgent group, no doubt about that. So, I'll tell you the truth, I was fairly sympathetic to their things, because I was advocating the same thing, that they don't restore the sugar mills. So I slept with them overnight and they let me sleep in the truck bed. They slept mostly in the grass. They hauled me a little further the next dathey had taken our jeep with us, too.

But the next day they had a lot of consultations and we talked a lot, and then they said, "Well, we don't have any quarrel with you. You can go back." So that was my kidnapping. It was no problem. But, anyway, I got back, at that time I was in the high commissioner's office, still. The embassy wasn't organized. No, it was '46, that's right.

So I wrote a long report on this, of course, for the State Department, on this experience, and nobody paid too much attention to it, but I knew more about Hukbalahaps than all these other officers did, because they only heard about all the raids on the villages, but I had actually spent time with the Hukbalahaps. That was a very interesting experience, and a very worthwhile one.

Q: Well, fortunately, we've had very few agricultural attachï¿½s who've been ever taken hostage, so I suspect this is a unique experience. I hope it is. Any last words before we break?

BOONSTRA: No, nothing more. I may think of a few more names for you, but I've enjoyed talking to you. It brings up a lot of subjects I haven't thought about for a long time.

ROSS: Didn't you become a hotel manager, also?

BOONSTRA: What's that?

ROSS: Weren't you a hotel manager?

BOONSTRA: Well, I mentioned that earlier. I mentioned earlier that for a couple of months we had the Manila Hotel, it was ruins. The Manila Hotel was the headquarters for the Japanese, and it was at that time the famous place of that part of the world, and when we took Manila, when I came there, the hotel was in absolute ruins. It's right across from the old city there, which had been the big scene of taking Manila, where we figured there were at least 10,000 Japanese buried under the rubbage, and they didn't spell very good, and there were an awful lot of rats. The rats were everywhere, dining on the Japanese, I guess.

Anyway, the hotel was in ruins, but one of MacArthur's first efforts after the Army Navy Club and getting the San Miguel Brewery straightened out was to restore the Manila Hotel as his headquarters. So the Army really put up little panels and took his little apartment at the top and made it there, and then he put the officers bachelors' quarters wherever they could find a reasonable, undamaged spot in the lower part of the hotel.

So that's where I was living, in the officers' quarters, and the funny part about thathis is an interesting story. In 1985, I had a consulting job that took me to Thailand and a few other places, tropical forestry. I dropped off on my own in Manila, the first time I'd been back, and I thought I'd like to go to the Manila Hotel. Well, I walked in the Manila Hotel and the clerk looked at me and said, "We have no space, no room in the hotel. Everything's booked."

I said, "Well, I really wanted to stay here very much, because I was one of the first residents of the hotel. In fact, at one time, I had a couple of months I ran this hotel for the United States Army." He said, "Well, maybe you ought to talk to the manager."

So I go to the manager's office in the Manila Hotel, all restored beautifully now, by the way, by that time in 1985. I saw the manager and I told him my story and he said, "Oh well, we have a place for you." But he said, "It's not a place we rent, so the clerk was correct, we don't rent these places. We have a suite of 10 rooms in the Manila Hotel which we call the MacArthur Suite, and it's run as a club, and we don't rent out these rooms except to people who" this is 1985, stil"have some special claim or are a special guest or a special state guest, but we'll provide this room to you."

He said, "Also, it has some special features. It has an open bar at all times. If you would like to have your clothes pressed and your shoes shined, just leave them in the hall and they'll be back in your room a few hours later. And we also serve snacks in the evening." And I said, "Well, that would be fine. I'd appreciate it." He said, "The price will be the same as our regular rooms." And, interesting about it, it was not MacArthur's old suite. It was a separate little suite of 10 rooms, and two rooms down from me was the room that I lived in when it was a wreck, when it was a ruin, in fact, back in 1945. Interesting.

This is a little note about an event that began in Brazil long ago. When I was in Brazil as agricultural attachï¿½, one of my first jobs was to assist in a big project in Brazil by the Rockefeller Foundation and Associated Enterprises because of a fear that had arisen somewhere in the United States, somewhere in our government, about wheat rust, which they feared that the Russians were going to devastate American crops by airborne wheat rusts, which really have some potency and certain of them that could really destroy almost our entire crops. So they wanted to get a rapid growth area where they could harvest two crops a year to advance the progress.

So they started a project in Brazil. We had 5,000 different strains of wheat rust, and the agricultural attachï¿½ was asked to clear the way for it with the Brazilian government, which I was able to do. And we planted those all in Rio Grande do Sul, in a highly classified project in testing this 5,000 different strains of wheat rust to try to breed them into immunity. And one of the men who came down to assist in that project was Norman Borlaug, later Nobel prize winner.

And then later, when I was deputy chief of mission in Mexico, Norman was at the Chapingo, just finishing up his work on developing these short-stalk varieties of wheat and rice, and we talked over a lot of the problems, I still remember from the Philippines, on rice. So he was also working pretty hard on rice.

Well, you all know what happened to his wheat strains, which were first exploited in India, and later has changed the whole Mexican and the Brazilian wheat picture. In fact, it may be too old for even Garth.

THORBURN: No, I remember this.

BOONSTRA: I was working for Weyerhaeuser. I didn't really do this. Some of the other scientists did, but all of a sudden I found that they had hired Norman to investigate the possibility of doing something similar with Pinus elliottii, the slash pine, like we grow around here, which grow very rapidly in the hot tropics, but you have to have the right strains and so forth. So they asked Norman to spend a month with me in the tropical area of Brazil, so I had a chance to travel with him there, so it was a very close association between Norm Borlaug.

Q: That's interesting.

BOONSTRA: Then, in later years, he came down to the University of Florida. You may have been here. He gave some lectures here, which I happily attended, of course.

ROSS: The York lecture.

BOONSTRA: What?

ROSS: Was it the York lecture?

BOONSTRA: Yes, they brought him down for the York lectures. That's the fellow I wanted to mention.

End of interview